

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SMOKEY BEAR!

Smokey Bear has cautioned America to be careful with fire while enjoying the forest. The idea of preventing carelessly caused wildfire came long before his time. This idea quickly grew into a necessity. With the advent of World War II, Americans feared that an enemy attack or sabotage could destroy our forest resources at a time when wood products were greatly needed. As a result of this concern, the USDA Forest Service organized the Cooperative Forest Fire Prevention (CFFP) Program in 1942. It encouraged citizens nationwide to make a personal effort to prevent forest fires.

To help convey the concept to the public, the Forest Service asked the War Advertising Council for assistance. This newly formed group of advertisers volunteered their time, expertise, and portions of their media schedules to help the government mobilize civilian support for the war effort. The council recognized the importance of protecting our forests from fire and began a campaign that encouraged people to assist the war effort by doing what they could do to prevent forest fires. Timber was, after all, a primary commodity for battleships, gunstocks, and packing crates for military transport. In 1944, the council produced an appealing poster featuring Walt Disney's "Bambi" character. The success of this poster demonstrated that an animal of the forest was the best messenger to promote the prevention of accidental forest fires.

On August 9, 1944, the Forest Service and the War Advertising Council introduced a bear as the campaign symbol. This bear was to be black or brown and his expression intelligent, appealing, and slightly quizzical. To look his part, he would wear a traditional campaign hat. Albert Staehle, noted illustrator of animals, worked with this description to paint the forest fire prevention bear. His art appeared in the 1944 campaign, and the advertising symbol was given the name "Smokey Bear." This first poster carried the caption: "Smokey says: Care will prevent 9 out of 10 forest fires." As the campaign grew, Smokey reached out to Americans from posters and roadside billboards, from the pages of magazines and newspapers, and over the air from hundreds of broadcasting stations. Many major corporations donated valuable advertising time and space. The result was great success for the Smokey Bear symbol and a decrease in accidental, human-caused forest fires.

### **The Campaign Develops**

After World War II, the War Advertising Council changed its name to the Advertising Council. In the years that followed, the focus of Smokey's campaign broadened to appeal to children as well as adults. The earliest pictures of Smokey Bear varied in appearance from year to year, but his confident, friendly manner and the good sense of his fire prevention message were always there. It was not until the work of Chuck Kuderna, during the 1965 campaign, that Smokey's image evolved into the one we know today. In addition to the public service advertising campaign, there were other needs for original art in the CFFP Program.

In 1946, Rudy Wendelin, an artist for the Forest Service, began producing a tremendous quantity of Smokey Bear art in various media for special events, publications, and licensed products to promote the fire prevention symbol. Long after retiring, he created the art for the Smokey Bear's 40th anniversary commemorative U.S. Postage stamp. In Forest Service circles he is still known affectionately as "Smokey's artist."

### **A Live Bear**

A significant chapter in Smokey's long history began early in 1950, when a burned cub survived a fire in the Lincoln National Forest near Capitan, New Mexico. Because this bear survived a terrible forest fire and won the love and imagination of the American public, many people mistakenly believe the cub was the original Smokey Bear, but in reality he did not come along until the advertising symbol was almost six years old. After being nursed back to health, Smokey came to live at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., as a living counterpart to the CFFP Program's fire prevention symbol. Over the years, thousands of people from around the world came to see Smokey Bear at the National Zoo. A mate, Goldie, was introduced with the hope a young Smokey would continue the tradition of the famous living symbol. These efforts failed and an adopted son was sent to the zoo so the aged bear could retire on May 2, 1975. After many years of popularity, the original Smokey died in 1976. His remains were returned to Capitan and rest beneath a stone marker in Smokey Bear State Park. For more than 15 years, the adopted Smokey carried on as the living symbol, but in 1990, when the second Smokey Bear died, the living symbol was laid to rest.

### **New Challenges**

Smokey's task is becoming increasingly difficult. In years past, it was a challenge for his message to reach traditional visitors to the forest. Now we are faced with getting his wildfire prevention message to an increasing number of people who live in and around these areas. This "wildland-urban interface" poses a double threat; from people living in or near forests who may accidentally start fires that spread to the wildlands as well as from accidental fires started in the wild that spread to nearby residences. In either case, the result is potentially disastrous but especially tragic because it is preventable. The challenge continues as Smokey Bear turns 60. Demand for our natural resources continues to grow, as does the population of forested areas. In the future, the need to prevent accidental wildfire will be greater than ever.

Smokey Bear has been working for 60 years to remind Americans of the importance of outdoor fire safety and wildfire prevention. With reports of devastating wildfire increasing, Smokey Bear's wildfire prevention message is more vital today than ever before.

**Remember...only YOU can prevent forest fires!**